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Program Has Area Workers Biking, Busing

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BOULDER – When Karl Hanzel looks out onto his workplace's parking lot, he doesn't necessarily like what he sees.

"I know there could be so many fewer cars sitting there," said Hanzel, a systems administrator with the University Corp. for Atmospheric Research (UCAR) and the National Center for Atmospheric Research (NCAR) in Boulder. "We're making strides, but a lot more could be done." As a volunteer member of the GO Boulder Employee Transportation Coordinator network (ETC) sponsored by the city of Boulder, Hanzel promotes alternative transportation to the employees of NCAR/UCAR. As a result of such efforts, NCAR/UCAR recently joined the Commuter Choice Leadership Initiative, a voluntary program jointly sponsored by the Environmental Protection Agency and Transportation Department.

UCAR is a consortium of universities that manages the NCAR research sites.

Commuter Choice establishes a "standard of excellence" for the commuting benefits an employer offers to its employees. When an employer joins the program, it commits to offering a variety of

commuting options, thereby improving air quality and congestion in the community.

In return, employers gain public recognition from the EPA as a Commuter Choice Employer. The EPA also provides materials, tools and technical assistance to help employers take full advantage of savings in taxes and parking expenses.

The city of Boulder began promoting the Commuter Choice Leadership Initiative in July. "We sent out information packets to all of our 132 ETCs inviting them to participate," said Michele Coffelt, transportation outreach specialist for the city's GO Boulder program, an initiative begun in 1989 to encourage alternative transportation.

So far, 13 companies and organizations in Boulder have signed on as charter members: Access Graphics, Boulder County, Boulder Denver Bicycle Couriers, City of Boulder, NCAR/UCAR, New Hope Natural Media, PEH Architects, U.S. Geological Survey, Radio Reading Service of the Rockies, Roche Colorado, Silver Wave Records, The Daily Camera and the University of Colorado.

"Participating was an easy way for us to endorse the alternative transportation concept without

having to modify employee behavior," said Hanzel. NCAR/UCAR offers its 1,100 employee shuttles between its Foothills and Mesa labs, bus passes, bicycle parking facilities, showers and complimentary "blue bikes" for employees and visitors who want to explore Boulder by bike. Members of NCAR/UCAR's Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) educate new employees about the company's alternative transportation benefits during orientation.

However, companies aren't required to have thousands of employees to participate in Commuter Choice. Silver Wave Records, with just six employees, and Roche Colorado, with 300 employees, are also Commuter Choice Employers.

Joanna Spindler, marketing and promotions director for Silver Wave, keeps maps and bus schedules on display in a common area so all three businesses in the building can benefit. "RTD provides these materials for free," she said. Spindler also makes an effort to stay as knowledgeable as possible about transportation alternatives and lets people know she is available as a resource, "even if they just have a question about using the bus to go to the airport once."

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John Tayer, community relations manager at Roche Colorado, saw the Commuter Choice program's criteria as relatively easy to meet. "We are already committed to promoting and participating in alternative transportation at Roche, and we wanted to challenge ourselves to see how high we could set the bar," he said.

All Roche employees are eligible for a free bus pass, and the company promotes walk- and bike-to-work weeks through raffles. "We also sponsor a Rush Hour Relief program that encourages employees to monitor their commutes and take one alternative trip per week," Tayer said.

The Commuter Choice program takes advantage of a 3-year-

old tax law that lets employers provide workers with as much as \$65 a month in tax-free commuter vouchers or lets them buy as much as \$65 in transit passes with pretax payroll deductions. The goal of the EPA is to sign up 1,000 major employers by the end of 2002.

The commuting options promoted through the Commuter Choice Leadership Initiative include allowing employees to trade their free parking space for cash, transit-fare subsidies, telecommuting, compressed work schedules, flexible work schedules, carpools, vanpools, bicycle parking and shuttles from transit stations.

In addition to offering alternative means of transportation, employers must meet a minimum level of employee participation, designate a central point of con-

tact, centralize commuter-benefit information so it is easy for employees to find, promote the availability of commuter benefits to employees, and report program progress to the EPA annually.

Several national companies are also offering comprehensive commuter choice programs, including American Express, SmithKline Beecham, Intel, Kaiser Permanente, Nike and AT&T. State and local governments in Maryland, Georgia, Texas and Oklahoma have also become involved.

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